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Methods of Philosophical Research.

(*A paper read before the Bangalore Cantonment Branch of the Theosophical Society, by N. P. Subramania Aiyer*, F.T.S.)

STUDENTS of metaphysics are often lost in a maze with regard to the particular method to be employed in metaphysical investigations. Those methods that are deemed suitable for arriving at inductive generalizations, fail to answer our purpose when applied to the ultra-physical plane, *i. e.*, anything beyond the material, hence physical—which will in the following pages be styled Metaphysical. As understood by a majority of thinking men, the processes subsidiary to induction are observation, experiment and classification. The associating of the ebb and flow of tides with the phases of the moon, is the result of pure observation. To ascertain with precision the relative proportion of oxygen and hydrogen in a given quantity of water by electrolysis, is experiment. Methods recognized by deep thinkers as conducive to arriving at wide generalities from individual particulars observed in the realm of nature, in her purely mater-

nal aspect,—hence processes subsidiary to induction—are observation, experiment and classification. I do not here propose to go far into the heart of physical researches, the triumph of modern science; for the conclusions of these elaborate methods of research have found their way into a thousand and one treatises on physical science. Beyond the material plane, where a select few have travelled, who cared to speculate on things not cognizable by the senses, yet absolute realities in the subjective world of phenomena, as real to the mind's eye, as day and night to the corporeal—lies the metaphysical; lying beyond the physical as the very term implies. The term is very comprehensive. It includes everything that escapes the scrutiny of the methods above referred to, namely, observation and experiment *by means of the physical senses*. From the theosophic standpoint, metaphysics should be understood to embrace both the theoretical and the practical sides of occultism. Let me illustrate what I mean. To accomplish any object aimed at, to produce something phenomenally, without lifting even so much as a finger, without exerting any *physical* force, purely through the agency of will, appertains to the practical side of occultism. To be absorbed in speculation upon the descent of spirit into matter, upon the evolution of monads, upon the human rounds, with the number of their races and subraces, upon the solar system, upon the planetary chains and the like, constitutes theoretical metaphysics. From this, it is evident that the recognised methods of research are not in the least applicable here, rather that these cannot be advantageously employed by every student of occultism, unless it be under the guiding hand of an adept in that branch of science, and under his blessing. You cannot found a professorship in every college for the teaching of this science. The conditions of studentship are manifold and the difficulties are insuperable. Broadly speaking, the methods employed must be adapted to the nature of the class of phenomena under investigation. The former must always be subservient to the latter. The instrument to be selected for the purpose of breaking up a phenomenon into its component parts should be determined by the

phenomenon itself. We have common sense enough not to commence the investigation of mental phenomena with a hammer and a chisel; for by breaking open the skull we shall have left nothing there for our observation. It has been already shewn how, from the observed particulars, always assuming that there has not been hitherto observed to exist any instance to the contrary—and if there had been any, it should not have been ignored seeing that our conclusions are based on the collective testimony of human experience—we take a leap from the known to the unknown and from the less general to the more general. It is on the strength of such an induction that the possibilities of a given phenomenon are calculated. This is the method of inductive research. How far this can be carried into the realm of occult metaphysics, remains to be seen. Attempts have been, and are being made, to unravel the hidden mysteries in psychic states, by following out these methods. To determine the degree of success attained in this direction, we have to possess a clear idea of what this science mainly deals with, its scope, the nature of the phenomena to be investigated, its various aspects, and its relations with, or correlations to, the conditions contributing to the occurrence of the phenomenon. In writing out my thoughts on the subject the chief object aimed at, is to enable such of you as are acquainted with the western modes of thought, to pursue your studies in occultism with advantage. Not being in a position to comprehend the occult metaphysic in its entirety, still less to point out the path to the attainment of divine wisdom, I cannot be expected to give anything new. In one word, I cannot instruct you. You must try to think out for yourselves, and gain everything that it has not been my good fortune to experience.

Psychology deals essentially with subjective phenomena, as they occur, as they are, and does not concern itself with things as they ought to be. It is pre-eminently a theoretic science, though many of the practical sciences, "have their footing in Psychology," as observed by Mr. Sully. Mental states are the basis of its operation. Its intimate connexion with

Physiology, renders the mental phenomena complex, and sometimes inexplicable. Its scope as defined by Herbert Spencer is that, looking to the fundamental connexion between nervous changes and "psychical states," and the confusion arising between the phenomena underlying Psychology and the phenomena of Physiology itself, "every psychological proposition is necessarily compounded of two propositions of which one concerns the subject and the other the object, and cannot be expressed without the four terms which the two propositions imply." Take for instance an orange. It has colour, size and taste. So long as we contemplate the relation between colour and taste, *i.e.*, by themselves, or colour and taste as associated with some external phenomenon, we are in the realm of physical science.* Now when we study the sensations produced by this object—the sensation produced on the organism by the light it reflects, on the retina of the eye and the optic centres, and the sensation of sweet taste produced by the juice setting up nervous changes in the tongue, we deal with physiological facts. "The moment we begin to enquire, how there comes to exist in the organism a relation between the sensations given above, that in some way or other corresponds to the relation between colour and taste we pass into the domain of Psychology." We have a physiological fact upon which there arises a psychological discussion. Psychology inquires into the nature, origin and meaning of the mental phenomena. The scope of Psychology therefore is to classify mental phenomena and to determine the laws of their production, to show how simple states combine to make complex mental states. This can be effected in two ways.

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* This statement is liable to misapprehension owing to the fact that our language uses the same terms—*i.e.*, colour and taste—to denote both certain "mental states" or "sensations" as well as their assumed objective correlates. In reality, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by the physical scientists, there is no such thing as "colour" or "taste" in the orange *as such*. Colour and taste express only the relation between the "orange" and our subjectivity. The orange *per se*, in the eyes of physical science, is a mere system of vibrating atoms and molecules totally devoid of any attributes in any way or degree resembling "colour" or "taste,"—B. K.

We may either try to resolve the mental product into its prime factors, a procedure known as the inductive method upon which so much has been said in the previous pages, or "set out from elementary facts and by the help of certain inductive laws reconstruct the successive stages of physical production," known as the deductive method. Let me illustrate the value of these methods and shew how far they are applicable to the investigation of occult phenomena. Whether the inductive method is deducible from the deductive or the deductive is based on laws reached by previous inductions, is not what I propose going into. Volumes have been written upon the subject. A host of opinions have been expressed, and no two philosophers agree in ascribing priority to either.

Which of the methods is preferable for investigating psychological phenomena, *i. e.*, to enquire into the nature, origin and meaning of such phenomena? Whatever may be the opinion of philosophers the fact remains, that without a final appeal to consciousness, no satisfactory solution to any psychological phenomenon could be found. What is this consciousness? It is mental life or "a heightened form of mental life," as evidenced in a more than ordinary wakefulness and excitement. Loss of consciousness would imply mental extinction. The three departments of mind, viz., feeling, will and intellect are so closely interwoven, that we cannot be all one to the exclusion of the other two. In a normal condition, the element of consciousness is ever present. This is the view of the western Philosophers. From the standpoint of occultism, what is called here sensation should be taken to imply only the transmission along the nervous tracks of impressions from without. Impressions from the material world upon the peripheral nerves generate a vibratory movement in the sensory filaments, which in their turn set in motion the corresponding sensory centres. What is that which makes this a fact of our consciousness? Whence the intellectual element? The intellectual element must be supplied by something else, as these series of vibratory movements cannot be conscious of themselves. For change of impression is essential to what is

ordinarily known as mental life. Knowing is classifying and comparing. The power to recognize a similarity of impression and compare them with other like impressions cannot inhere in the brain-cells. Whence the power then? "We class sensations along with *emotions*, and *volitions*, and *thoughts*, under the common head of *states of consciousness*. But what consciousness is, we know not; and how it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about as the result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as any other ultimate fact of nature," says Professor T. H. Huxley. Suppose we employ the analytic, or the *à posteriori* method,—proceed from the products to factors, we shall first get at conscious impressions, and then the physiological changes resulting from impressions impinging upon our material organism from the physical universe. This is only the objective side of the question. The essential functions of the mind must be called next into play. To study the mental phenomena, an accurate classification or grouping of the objective facts, based on discrimination, can be made out only by "mind." This is purely a subjective process: "the turning of the mind round on itself so as to recognise its own states"; this faculty being no other than Lock's "*Reflection*" or Kant's "*Internal sense.*" Here two questions naturally arise, "what does this consciousness testify to, and what is the degree of the credibility of its testimony?" Consciousness testifies *first* to the experience of the individual alone—leaving out the cases where consciousness fails to interpret emotional experiences—as for instance, emotions of anger, surprise, &c. Secondly, the degree of credibility to be attached to this testimony, determined in the consciousness of the very same individual, must necessarily vary with individuals. From end to end there is uncertainty. This is due to identifying the mental states with consciousness itself. Recent investigations of the phenomena of clairvoyance tend to strengthen the conclusion that the laws now alleged to govern mental phenomena, will become more and more uncertain as the researches are pushed further and further.

A study of Occult Phenomena—by Occult Phenomena, I mean such manifestations of power as have not been hitherto scientifically investigated and classified by the exponents of modern science or philosophy—is sure to make one exclaim with Hamlet:—

> "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of, in your philosophy."

The solemnity of such a warning has a deep significance only to a neophyte. The moment you turn your attention from the laws that govern the material phenomena in nature, to those that guide and control the subtle matter, you are face to face with "Occult Dynamics." A veil has fallen from your eyes and a vista of strange visions transcending in beauty and harmony those you have been hitherto acquainted with, dawns upon your senses—(occult centres of sensation). You have to commence investigation of this class of phenomena under different conditions. This may cost you years of untiring industry and persevering devotion to the work so eagerly undertaken. Each phenomenon you meet with, in this strange realm of nature, must stand or fall upon its own merits.

H. B. Blavatsky in speaking of Occultism says, "It teaches the secret potency of things in nature, developing and cultivating the hidden powers 'latent in man,' thus giving him tremendous advantages." In other words, it is "the hidden science dealing with the constitution of man and his relation to the Universe, whereby man learns to attune his mind and consciousness with the absolute mind of consciousness, and which shews him the means by which such a result can be attained" By pursuing the analytical method, we can collect materials from objective manifestations, enough for an inductive generalization. This induction will be found quite competent to deal with objective experiences. But by the expression—"the constitution of man" is not meant the physical basis of objective experiences alone. What the expression actually imports, is the basic principles that act or react on each other and embrace all that is connoted by the term "*man*." Otherwise a large number of

psychic phenomena will have to be left out of account, if by *constitution* the physical basis of life alone is meant. The next point which requires your careful attention is the distinction observed in the theosophical literature between mind and consciousness. Mind, as you are all aware, is the third principle counting from above and the fifth from below. It belongs to the upper triad. I think mind has only a functional relation to the physical body: Consciousness being its manifestation or expression. Mind is dual in its nature—the higher being in eternal relation with *Á'tma* and *Buddhi*—and the lower in temporary relation with the lower quaternary—the *Kâma*, *Prâna*, *Linga S'arîra* and the *Sthûla S'arîra*

Consciousness in the higher region of mind may be interpreted as inspiration, the highest intuition man is capable of; whereas consciousness in the lower region, is intellection, volition and feeling. The reason why a distinction is observed between mind and consciousness becomes apparent, if we understand and appreciate our every-day's experience. When we grow unconscious of our surroundings, as in sleep, there is the sleepless vigil kept by the mind which furnishes the several links by which our varied experiences (as in active life, waking life, dreaming life, &c.) are made to run into an undivided whole.

Let me explain a phenomenon from the theosophic point of view. We see a lustre here, suspended from the roof of this room. When the eye is directed to this object the rays of light enter the pupil and produce an optical effect. The image of the lustre formed on the retina, that is, this impression impinging on the material molecules of the eye, sets in vibration the constituent cells of the organ, that of sight. The image is then transplanted, *i. e.*, these vibrations in their own turn set in motion the corresponding material fibres—and so on until the impression is duly conveyed to the material centres of sensation. These material centres of sensation are in the *Linga S'arîra*. From thence these vibrations are propagated into the mental plane—may be of a rarer matter still—which act upon the cerebral cen-

tres. When this original impression becomes an object of mental perception, we are said to be conscious of the existence of an object—called a lustre. What is it that converts these vibrations into a sensation? We understand how these vibrations have been propagated. *Prâna* vitalises the organs, through it a certain degree of activity is stimulated, and the organs begin to function. These vibrations would have remained as such, if the principle of *Kâma* did not "translate them into sensations." The part played by each factor of the lower quaternary becomes clear, when we break up a phenomenon into its component parts. "Impressions therefore from the material world impinge on our physical senses and set in vibration the molecular constituents of the organs. These provoke a corresponding series of vibrations which reach the occult centres of sensation, which are in the *Linga S'arira*. The outer and the inner centres of sensation would have refused to function, had they not been vibrant with *Prâna*. These vibrations propagated into the mental plane, wherein they get diffused among the cerebral centres, would remain only vibratory movements, did not *Kâma* interpret them into feelings."

Sensations are either pleasurable or painful. There is a tendency in us to strive for the continuance of what is pleasurable and for the avoidance of what is painful. This is the origin of will in man, say the psychologists. But this will seems to be the result of the conjunction of the *Kâma* principle with the *Lower Manas*. Sensations are manufactured in the *Kâmic* plane, materials being supplied by the physical organism. To rationalise these sensations, that is, determine whether they can be allowed to persist or not, some other principle is needed and this is supplied by the *Lower Manas*. In *Kâma-manas*, Will has its seat.

The "Secret Doctrine" says, "Kriyasakti is the mysterious power of thought which it enables it to produce external, perceptible, phenomenal results by its own inherent energy. The ancients held that any idea will manifest itself externally if one's attention is deeply concentrated upon it. Similarly an

intense volition will be followed by the desired results." Such a phenomenon is possible only under very rigid conditions—conditions such as will not be in the power of average man. As the power attributed to *will,* in this instance, is not within the ken of ordinary man and as it rests upon data likely to be taken for mere assumptions, men of superior development and training alone can constitute themselves judges to pronounce upon the validity of such a doctrine. Occultism recognizes no other tribunal. This will with mighty potentialities locked up within it, cannot be the offspring of the *Kâma-manas,* alluded to elsewhere. Hence, in the words of Annie Besant, "Another power resident in the *Higher Manas* and manifested on the lower planes by those in whom the *Higher Manas* is consciously master, is that of creation of forms by the will." Mrs. Besant's exposition of the hierarchy of the will is highly logical and admirable. For this I must refer my hearers to her book, "The Seven Principles of Man." It has been truly said that "the will is the great pulsating heart of the soul—the reservoir of the spirit." It may even be regarded as the trunk of the tree of life. All energising influence, the direction in which this influence should be felt, in fact all our conscious acts proceed from the will. Will is the head sluice where the quantity as well as the quality of fresh energy is determined. From will radiate all actions for which we, as conscious agents, are held responsible. It is the will that gives colour to all our motives, intentions and the like. Stability, firmness, determination, self-esteem, independence, self-poise, the prime characteristics of the will become as innate in the race as any other volitional tendency in man.

By the analytic or inductive method we can hope to get at the laws that govern the phenomena of the lower quaternary. A comparative psychology can be constructed from the objective data furnished by the four lower principles in man. This must necessarily be defective as it cannot embrace the workings of the higher principles in man—known as the higher triad—*Á'tma-Buddhi-Manas.* Any exposition of this higher triad must be incomprehensible as it would be beyond the range of

our ordinary experience. I pretend to no knowledge of these laws. I can however clearly calculate the possibilities of these principles. This mode of reasoning will satisfy none but myself. In one point both Eastern and Western Psychology agree. We Easterns have given as much prominence to physiological facts as the Western philosophers have done. They have in fact, carried their researches to such a degree as to postulate a possible relation of a certain class of psychological phenomena to certain physiological conditions. They have been led to regard certain forces contributing to the production of a phenomenon, as the direct outcome of a certain adjustment or harmony in the nervous system. An exclusive attention to the finding out of a peculiar adaptation, position or relation, by whatever term it may be known, has been mischievous in its consequences—at least in the East,—not that it resulted in downright or dogmatic materialism, but that it became the all-absorbing question whereby the attention of the student was directed only to physiological "*Upadhis*." The inevitable result of following out such a mode of enquiry, here as well as everywhere, has been a school of philosophy which attempted to interpret everything in terms of "*Upadhis*" to the exclusion of the influence shed by the divine ray from the Higher Triad. We can proceed on objective facts only to a limited extent. Beyond that, lies a region unknown to, and unapproached by, the ordinarily recognised methods of research. Consciousness, as I have pointed out elsewhere, is only the expression of mind in different *Upadhis*. The adaptation referred to, may be *a* condition but not *the* condition—hence it is only accessory. A full play of this ray of the divine monad is quite essential.

When we are repeatedly reminded of the fact that our methods of procedure are imperfect and defective, when the so-called established theories of modern science are only mere hypothesis at their best, destined to be superseded by grander conceptions of human nature and its laws, all in the womb of the future, precisely, in the same manner as the later day theo-

ries have supplanted those propounded prior to their origin. How vain and foolish then must be our boast that we are in a world of stern reality, where every item of our experience and knowledge can be completely analysed according to laws of induction already formulated. If modern science were to refuse to admit mere hypotheses, which are but the best and happiest guesses possible under the existing circumstances, it would be justified in refusing a hearing to the doctrines of the occultists. When on the other hand, we see, those regarded as well established, every day revised and expanded, or so much modified as to possess nothing in common with the original—all due to the growing conceptions of the universe—by what right do we then denounce new theories as audacious innovations? We are in an age of progress and yet we deny to ourselves all chances of progress ; what strange inconsistency in human nature! We yet speak logic, ourselves being the most illogical of beings. What possibilities may not the Higher Triad be destined to unfold to our view? What faculties may we not develop? What strange experiences may we not acquire in the long run? Who can be positive? What a short-sighted policy is rigid conservatism! This is the climax of absurdity and egotism. When we tread upon a path hitherto untravelled, the safest guide is reasoning by analogy and correspondence. The law of correspondence holds good at all times and in all places. In the stern logic of every day life, this is tacitly assumed. Whenever it was found desirable to take a step in advance, it was also found expedient to make a final appeal to this law. Whatever origin you may ascribe to this law, it serves all the same as the ground-work of all your inductions. If this law be emperically derived, the conclusion forces itself upon you that the ground of induction is an induction, deductively applied. I have no mind to pick a quarrel with any one, to combat the cherished views of any. This law of correspondence must give a clue to the understanding of many psychic phenomena otherwise regarded as mysterious. Once granted that a satisfactory analysis has not been made of all our subjective experiences,

the best course is to apply this law of correspondence, aided by analogy. When the subjective experiences of a human being of average mental capacity, differ widely from those of one of extraordinary development, and when this difference in the nature of his experiences is accounted for, by education, greater susceptibility, sensitive temperament and the like, why not admit a similar line of argument when adduced in favor of persons who can think in relation and out of relation with the physical body? In the one case attention is so far withdrawn from all object-regards, as consciousness may dwell in a region of its own. Under such circumstances, external stimulus has to be enhanced to make the senses respond to it; whereas under ordinary circumstances this degree of stimulus would generally result in pain. If it be possible for man to grow unconscious of his surroundings, when in an abstract condition, it is equally possible for a Yogi to live for years *in himself* and yet know nothing of the vast changes that might have come upon the world. It is only a question of degree.

Man as he now is, with all his faculties ranging only over a limited area of consciousness, cannot by even the highest conceivable stretch of reasoning and logic get a clear conception of the workings of the Higher Triad. I cannot do better than conclude in the words of Mrs. Besant: "But no words of mine can avail to explain or to describe that which is beyond explanation and beyond description. Words can but blunder along on such a theme, dwarfing and distorting it; only by long and patient meditation, can the student hope to vaguely sense something greater than himself, yet something which stirs at the innermost core of his being. As to the steady gaze directed at the pale evening sky there appears after a while, faintly and far away, the soft glimmer of a star, so to the patient gaze of the inner vision there may come the tender beam of the spiritual star, if but as a mere suggestion of a far-off world. Only to a patient and persevering purity will that light arise, and blessed beyond all earthly blessedness is he, who sees but the palest shimmer of that transcendent Radiance."

Why we do not remember our past lives.

(*Written for the Branch Papers.*)

One of the first questions that is asked, after an enquirer has read a little about Theosophy, is:—What is the use of our being born over and over again if we are not to remember our past lives? How can we possibly learn experience? This query is the result of ignorance or a want of knowledge, primarily of the septenary constitution of man, and secondarily of the teachings of Reincarnation and of Karma, the two fundamental ideas in the Theosophic philosophy. The enquirer, if he takes the trouble to read the "Key to Theosophy" will soon perceive how impossible it is for the transient memory and the body which serves him for one short life, to register matters of which it has had no experience itself; he will also learn, if he is spiritual enough, that not a single detail escapes; each and every one being most faithfully registered, the Ego drawing its own conclusions from all these experiences. The result is that the surroundings of a man's next birth owe their existence entirely to the sum total of his Karmic acts in previous lives.

The first point to be borne in mind in answering the above question, is certainly the constitution and nature of man, or rather, the principles of which he is made up. A man is not simply the mass of flesh and blood, &c., that we perceive through the medium of our physical senses. He is made up of several bodies: each of which, in ever-increasing spirituality, is the vehicle of the one immediately above it. Science acknowledges these principles though she calls them by different names, such as body, soul, life, animal instincts, &c. Some of them at death travel on to other states and spheres and so on to other existences, whilst the remainder, after the death of the physical body, are slowly disintegrated and separate into their component atoms, to be drawn together again by other influences and form other bodies.

These seven principles mentioned above are named severally:—*A'tma*—(Spirit—a ray from the Absolute); *Buddhi* (Spiri-

tual Soul—the vehicle of *Átma*); *Manas* (Mind or Intelligence)—this last principle linking the monad by its light to the mortal man for his lifetime.

These three principles form the higher trinity, but it depends upon whether the *Manas* is attracted more by *Buddhi* or by the *Kâma Rûpa*, how much of the *Manas* ascends into Devachan. The fourth principle *Kâma Rûpa*—(the seat of animal desires and passions, the animal man, the line of demarcation which separates the mortal man from his immortal destiny); the *Linga Śaríra* (the astral body or double), *Prâna* (or life—necessary only to the lower principles) and *Sthûla Śaríra* (or physical body—the vehicle of all the other principles during life) these last four form the quaternary and separate slowly after the death of the body.

It is the higher trinity which gains experience from the surroundings and incidents of earth-life, but these impressions are not carried into the lower consciousness of the man; only slight reflections come into his mind which he calls recollections and memories, and habitually confuses with the physical memory that dies with the lower quaternary of principles. It is not easy, however, to make the distinction, and those only who are to a certain extent spiritually developed can hope to do so. It should be our constant endeavour to make these decisions between what is eternal and real and that which is only transient. It is only when a man lives almost altogether in the higher states of consciousness, when he becomes enlightened in fact, that he is able to trace retrospectively the line of his previous lives as Prince Siddartha did when he became Buddha.

It may be asked, how can people believe in these principles if they know nothing about them? If people will believe in the force gravity, and the ether of science, which they have not touched, felt or heard, it surely is not unreasonable to allow others to believe in the Higher Self, or permanent Ego, which is really a more philosophical and logical hypothesis.

The body is simply a machine with a certain period assigned to it, and cannot last beyond that. It is nothing more or

less than the vehicle through which the higher principles may gain that experience—of life in all its phases—needful for their further spiritual advancement.

Each Ego as it reincarnates is given a new memory, and the latter has certainly no remembrance of past lives; it vanishes at the death of the lower principles. The higher principles record past experiences, and therefore, to gain conviction of the fact of reincarnation and other kindred truths, one must be *en rapport* with one's real permanent Ego—not the evanescent memory.

The fact that one's past lives are hidden from us is really the greatest blessing, for it is doubtful if people would gain experience if they could see the result of former experiences—not being able to judge what was really for their good; for they would probably try and experience over again earthly happinesses instead of learning the true lessons taught by experience; not to mention the heavy punishment some would have to bear in the strongest griefs or remorse for crimes committed in former lives.

It is our duty to let the past go and strive to live in the present only. If we live a life of uprightness, of kindness and of brotherly love—rest assured the time will come when we shall be able to look back; the regret, if any, being that we had not entered the path before, and a boundless love urging us to point the way to others.

R. W. N.

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